
Imprimatur.

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Swearing and Cursing.*

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DISCOURSE
CONCERNING
Prophane **SWEARING**
AND
CURSING.



Wherein

- I. Those Vices are describ'd and reprov'd.
- II. Both Magistrates and Private Persons are excited to their Duty in order to the Suppressing e'm by the Execution of the late *Act of Parliament* against e'm.
- III. And the Objections commonly rais'd against the present practice of Private Informations are modestly consider'd.

DUBLIN:

Printed by *Jos. Roy* at the 3 Nags Heads in *Essex-street*, for *Matthew Gunne* at the Bible and Crown at *Essex-Gate*. 1697.

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PROPHANE SWEARING

AND

CURSING.

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- I. Those Vices are detest'd and reprov'd.
- II. Both Magistrates and Private Persons are exhort'd to their Duty in order to the suppressing of them by the Execution of the late Act of Parliament against 'em.
- III. And the Objections commonly rais'd against the present practice of Private Informations are modestly consider'd.

Printed by J. Knap at the Press of the Society for Christianizing the Heathen, in the Strand, 1757.

A
D I S C O U R S E
C O N C E R N I N G

Prophane SWEARING and CURSING.

I Hope I need not make any long apology for a Discourse on this *subject*. Where an Epidemical Distemper reigns, no man can be blam'd for his regular endeavours, either to cure the Infected Persons themselves, or to stop the spreading of the fatal Contagion to others. And I fear, as to these *Vices* the Infection is too general, and the Disease too deeply rooted, to render any attempts unnecessary that are truly conducive to attain the proposed end. And for the method insisted on in this Discourse, I shall only suggest, That I thought it needful first to lay open the Nature of these *detestable Sins* (as the late *Act of Parliament* justly calls them); *Partly*, That if possible Men's Conviction concerning the absurdity and folly of e'm, may happily prevent the occasion of *penal severities* (which how gentle soever are never any farther desirable than they are absolutely necessary). *Partly*, To satisfy all unprejudic'd persons that those concern'd in promoting the Execution of this Law, are act'd by no other principles than their regular Zeal for the honour of *Almighty God*, and their sincere *Charity* to the *Offenders* themselves, the generality of whom, 'tis to be feared, are too stupid and hardned in their wretched practice to be reason'd out of it, and seem only capable of this last and hardest method of Cure.

I shall therefore in prosecution of my present Design treat on these 3 general Heads.

I. I shall briefly represent the *hainous Nature of those two common Vices of the Age, Profane Swearing and Cursing* in order to dissuade men from the practice of them.

II. I shall offer something to excite both *Magistrates and private persons to their duty*, in order to the suppressing these Vices by the Execution of the Law lately made against them.

III. I shall modestly examine what ground there is for the loud Complaints lately made against *Clandestine Informations*.

I. I shall briefly represent the *hainousness of those two common Vices of the Age, Profane Swearing and Cursing* in order to dissuade men from the practice of them.

And to prepare my way for this, It will be requisite to premise some account of the nature of these Sins by stating the true notions of them. And

First, For the Sin of *Profane Swearing*, We shall the more clearly apprehend what it is, if we first consider the nature of an *Oath* in general.

Now an Oath has been defin'd by the Masters of Heathen Morality, *A Religious affirmation, or A calling the Deity to witness in a controverted matter*. And it has been defin'd by the generality of Christian Writers to the same purpose, *An appeal to some supernatural Power, as the witness of the truth of what we affirm or promise, and the avenger of our falsehood and perfidiousness if we lye*. And indeed all do agree, that such an Appeal is an Oath in the most strict and proper sense.

But this account of an Oath seems only to agree to those wherein we swear by some *real or supposed Deity*, or at least some Inhabitant of the invisible World, that cannot be produc'd as a witness here on Earth. Whereas men may swear by inanimate and insensible Creatures themselves, who are not capable of giving any Testimony at all to the truth of what they say.

Thus the Heathens were wont to swear by the Heavens or the Earth, by the Sun or the Stars, &c. The Jews by *Jerusalem*, the Temple, or the Altar, &c. And therefore those who place the nature of an Oath in such an Appeal to a higher witness that is

not

not producible in human Courts of Judicature, do suppose that such expressions, as by the Heavens, by the Earth, &c. are only Oaths in an improper sense, or rather the abuse of an Oath, being senseless appeals to those things as the witnesses of the truth of what we speak that are not capable of giving any such Testimony.

But on the other hand, since such expressions were accounted *Oaths* in the common judgment of mankind, and our Saviour himself mentions them as proper Instances of *Swearing*, (See 5. *Matth.* 34, 35, &c. compared with 5. *James* 12.) others have rather chosen to give such an extensive notion of an Oath as may include these as proper Instances of Swearing, and therefore define an Oath to be, *The pawning some supposed undoubted being as a pledge of the truth of what we say, with an implicit imprecation of some penalty on our selves in case we lye.* Thus as when men swear by God they pawn his Being & perfections for the truth of what they declare, and in effect wish if they lye to be dealt with as those that deny them; so when they swear by the Heavens or the Earth, by the Sun or Stars, &c. The meaning of the Oath is, as sure as there is a Heaven and Earth, a Sun or Stars, so true is what I speak, and if I lye, let me be esteem'd and dealt with as if I had impudently deny'd the existence of these things. So when men swear by their Faith or Conscience, or hope of Salvation, they do in effect pawn these for the truth of their assertions or promises, and in effect wish if they lye to be treated as persons that have renounc'd all pretensions to Faith, to Conscience, or to the Hope of Salvation. So when Men swear by their Head, they make that a kind of pledge of the truth of what they speak, and virtually imprecate some mischief on it in case they lye. So that this latter description of an Oath seems at first somewhat different from the former, and more comprehensive; and indeed if what is call'd swearing by Creatures, be in the strict and proper sense an Oath, this seems the more clear and accurate account of it.

But yet we may in a great measure reconcile these two descriptions of an Oath, and make 'em of equal extent; if we take what our Saviour suggests in reference to swearing by Creatures, in its utmost latitude, *viz.* That on the account of that relation they all

Some way or other bear to God, there is in all swearing by Creatures, tho not an express yet an implicit Invocation of God and appeal to him. Thus he charges those that swore by the Heavens or the Earth, as virtually and by just construction swearing by that God, whose Throne the one, and whose Footstool the other was. Nay he supposes those that swore by their Head, implicitly to swear by that God whose workmanship it was, since we our selves cou'd not make one Hair of it black or white, *Matth. 5. 34, 35, 36.* compar'd with *Matth. 23. 21, 22.* For he speaks this (as Dr. *Pettit* in his various Lectiōns well observes) in opposition to the Jewish Doctors, who did not think swearing by Creatures to be properly Oaths, nor to have any obligatory vertue. For they thought no Oaths binding but those in which they swore by the name of God, (excepting their Oath by the Gold of the Temple and *Corban*, See *Matth. 23.*). And therefore our Lord on the contrary intimates to them, That God himself was interess'd whenever they swore by any of his Creatures; For since they cou'd bear no proper testimony to the truth of their Assertions, or Promises, The Appeal was implicitly and by just interpretation made to him, and he was concern'd to punish the false Appellant. So that whoever by such Swearing pawns any of Gods Creatures for the Truth of his Words, do's virtually call their Maker to be his Witness, and engage him to avenge the Indignity offer'd to his own works, when they are abused to countenance our lying and falshood. It is not therefore of any great moment as to our practice whether of these two notions of an Oath we prefer and follow.

Having thus stated the general Notion of an Oath, we may more easily determine what profane Swearing is.

There is some Swearing in it self sinful and profane, and can never be lawfully used on any occasion, As the *swearing by a false God*; because such an Oath attributes the perfections of the only true God to a contemptible Idol, which is a high degree of *Blasphemy*.

But on the other hand, our Swearing by the true God, is either lawful and good, or sinful and profane, according to the circumstances wherein that action is used.

To swear by the Blessed God, is so far from being in its own nature an evil or impious action, that on the contrary when used on just and necessary occasions, 'tis an action highly conducive to the honour of God, and to the publick Good. 'Tis an action highly conducive to the honour of God, whose glorious perfections are openly acknowledged in those solemn regular Appeals we make to him, in such important cases wherein there is no other way left to confirm the truth of what we speak. And in such cases the Jews were by the Law of Moses not only permitted but requir'd to swear by the Name of God, *Deut. 6. 13.* That being one Branch of the Religious Worship due to him. Nay 'tis an action no less conducive to the publick good. It being one of the most proper and effectual means to end strifes and controversies among Men, by confirming the truth of what they speak, *Heb. 6. 13.* For since in so manifold cases we must depend on human Testimonies for finding out Truth, we can have no greater assurance that men speak truly, then when they solemnly appeal to God as the Witness of it, and their dreadful Avenger if they lye. For 'tis reasonably supposed that if any thing can oblige Men to a strict regard to Truth, in what they deliberately affirm, this awful Bond will. And Charity prompts us to hope that there are but few whose Consciences are so fear'd as to have no reverence for an Oath, and no dread of God's terrible Vengeance against those that by Perjury abuse his sacred Name to the support of known falshood.

And accordingly the Holy Scriptures abound with the Examples of good men's swearing on such solemn occasions. The instances in the *Old Testament* are numerous. Nay, even the *New Testament* contains frequent Examples of this Kind, even after the strict general prohibition of our Saviour, *Swear not at all.* For learned Criticks have made it evident, That our Saviour himself did thus swear when adjur'd by the High Priest, *Matth. 26. 62, 63, 64.* compar'd with *Lev. 5. 1.* And there is no pretence to doubt of this being several times practis'd by the Apostle Paul in his Epistles. *Sec 2 Cor. 11. 31. 1 Rom. 9. 1 Gal. 20. 2 Cor. 1. 23. 1 Thes. 5. 27.* And as the Quakers are the only people that pretend to deny the lawfulness of swearing, by interpreting our Saviours pro-

hibition in the strictest sense, so I do not see that they are herein consistent with themselves. For they do themselves frequently make solemn Appeals to God for the Truth of what they say; as Barclay himself tells us, They are wont on solemn occasions to say, *We speak the Truth in the fear of God and before him, who is our Witness and the Searcher of our hearts.* * He dos indeed deny this to be an *Oath*, (as he dos the forementioned Expressions of the Apostle Paul) but I take his denial to be contrary to the common sense of mankind concerning the nature and import of an *Oath*. So that 'tis rather the name of an *Oath*, and the circumstances of Swearing used among us, that they seem to boggle at then the thing it self.

Nor is Swearing by Creatures on such occasions unlawful in it self, when the Creature is only named in subordination to God, so that the Appeal it self is evidently intended and directed to him. Thus we read of Moses, calling the *Heaven and Earth to record* against the *Israelites*, that he had set before e'm life and death, *Deut. 30. 19, 21, 28.* So *Hannah* swears to *Ely*, *As thy Soul liveth, my Lord, I am the Woman that stood by thee here, praying to the Lord.* 1 Sam. 20. 3.— So *Abigail*, 1 Sam. 20. 26.— So *Uriah*, 2 Sam. 11. 11.— So in our common Form of Swearing we use these Words, *So help me God, and the Contents of this Book.* So it has been usual with good men in order to their vindication from gross publick Calumnies, to call *God, Angels, and Men*, to attest the Truth of what they offer in their own defence.

Now that Swearing (by God or his Creatures) which is in it self lawful, when used in a solemn manner on so important occasions, degenerates into sinful or profane Swearing, when 'tis us'd in our ordinary Converse without any such due seriousness and solemnity or any just occasion that shou'd render it needful to attain the forementioned ends. For as sacred things are said to be profan'd when they are irreverently manag'd and prostituted to any mean or vile use, so is an *Oath* profan'd, when we treat this awful act of Religious Worship with so little respect, as to prostitute it to common and mean purposes, in attesting our ordinary Discourse; whereas it shou'd

shou'd never be us'd but where there is apparent need of it to confirm some doubted Truth that must be determin'd by human Testimony. And the more expressly the Name of God himself is Invoked in such Oaths, the profaneness of them is more evident and uncontestable. For 'tis a manifest Indignity to that High and Glorious Being that his Sacred *Name* shou'd be thus interpos'd, and rash *Appeals* made to him upon every *frivolous* occasion, meerly to vent our irregular heat, or to give credit to every trifling Assertion in our common Conversation. Nay even when we do not make any explicit Appeal to God, 'tis yet a real *pollution* of his glorious and adorable Name, when we rashly toss it in our Mouths for no other purpose then to signify some foolish Wonder, or express some idle Passion, or applaud some vain Jest. Thus, O Lord, and O God, are common in the Mouths of many when they serve to no other end, but to fill up an empty gap in their ordinary Discourse.

Secondly, For the sin of *profane Cursing*, the notion of it is more plain and obvious.

'Tis indeed true that if we take *Cursing* in a large sense we cannot absolutely condemn it as sinful; For

1. If we give the Name of *Curses* to all those *Denunciations of the Vengeance of God against Sinners which are utter'd by a prophetick Spirit*, There is no doubt of the lawfulness of such Curses.

And indeed 'tis highly probable that many of those expressions which occur in the Psalms, and which our Translation makes to be *Imprecations* are no other then predictions of those Evils to the Churches Enemies which the Spirit of God dictated to the Inspired Penmen. And the Original does much favour this supposition; those expressions being usually not in the Imperative Mood, but in the Future Tense of the Indicative, and may be more properly rendred, *Mine Enemies shall be confounded*, then, *let them be so*.

2. All *Cursing* is not *Unlawful*, that does imply *the wishing some kind of Evil to others*.

For doubtless we may in reference to the Enemies of the true Religion, and indeed to all wicked and mischievous persons, without the least violation of the great Law of Charity, wish *disappointment*.

pointment in their pernicious Designs and Enterprizes, and the *shame* and *confusion* that such frustration of their attempts will occasion. Nay in any case of publick Contests wherein the interest of true Religion or of important civil Right is concern'd, we may lawfully wish and pray for success to those who espouse the just and righteous side of the Cause, against those that would either subvert the true Religion or invade and oppress the civil Rights of others. Nay this seems consistent with Charity, whether such Persecutors and Oppressors be supposed incorrigible or not. For if *incorrigible*, their overthrow is a very desirable publick Blessing. And if *corrigible*, their ill success is the most likely means to convince and reform e'm, as their prosperous one would be to harden e'm.

And to the one or other of these Heads, we may reduce all those Imprecations against their Enemies that the Penmen of the *Psalms* use, without supposing any thing in e'm contrary to the meek and forgiving disposition which the Law of Christ so positively enjoyns.

There are indeed some *Curses* us'd by good men in Scripture that do not belong to these Heads. Such as those of *Job* and of *Jeremy* chiefly level'd against the *day of their birth*, *Job. 3. Jer. 20.* But then I think we are under no obligation to justify them. They seem rather mention'd for our caution as instances of human Infirmary, of too great impatience and discontent under the pressure of their present afflictions.

The *Cursing* then which the Scriptures condemn (and which this Act of Parliament refers to) implies such *rash Wishes of Evil to others or our selves which we utter either in our passion or from a Spirit of malice and revenge, or from a meer pleasure in such hellish Language.*

And it falls under the notion of *profane Cursing*, as we either directly and expressly, or by just construction solicit the Vengeance of God for the infliction of such mischiefs on others or our selves. And the greater the mischiefs are which we thus rashly imprecate, and the more eminently the Justice of God is concern'd in the execution of e'm, the higher is the degree of *profaneness*. So that the

the common Expressions which Cursers now use, when they call on God to *damn themselves or others*, contain the most horrid guilt that this Sin can easily admit of. And truly that other phrase falls little short of it, by which Men so often give *themselves or others* to the Devil, who is consider'd in such wretched Imprecations as the Executioner of Divine Justice.

Having stated the general notion of profane Swearing and Cursing, I come now to offer a few Arguments to dissuade men from the practice of them.

And those shall be drawn, from the *Express prohibition of these Sins*, from the *intrinsic Evil and pernicious tendency of them*, from the *Threatnings of God denounc'd against them*, and from the *weakness and folly of the pretences alledg'd to excuse or extenuate them*.

First I begin with the *express prohibition of these Vices*.

Thus for *common Swearing*, that this is prohibited by the Law of God can be doubted by none that own the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures. If we suppose (with the generality of Expositors) that our Saviour's Sermon in the Mount gives us an Interpretation of rather than an addition to the precepts of the Decalogue, there is no question but *common swearing* is one instance of *taking God's Holy Name in vain* forbidden in the Third Command. But none ever pretended to deny, that our Saviour here forbids all such *Common Swearing*, when he so strictly charges us not to *Swear at all*, when he enjoyns that *our Communication be Tea, Tea, Nay, Nay*, and adds this reason of it, *For whatsoever is more than these comes of evil*, See *Matth. 5.* from vers. 34. to 38. For he delivers this charge in opposition to the *Jewish Doctors*, who themselves thought *swearing by the Name of God* in their ordinary converse *unlawful*, but made greater allowance for what they accounted *smaller Oaths*, as *swearing by Creatures* without any express appeal to God or mention of him. And since our Lord condemns all *lesser Oaths* in common Converse, he must in all reason be understood much more to forbid all common swearing by the *Name of God*. And 'tis evident that the *Apostle James* so understood these words of our Saviour, when he delivers the like prohibition in so peremptory and comprehensive Expressions, *But above all things,*

my Brethren, swear not, neither by Heaven, nor by Earth, neither by any other Oath. But let your Yea be Yea, and your Nay be Nay, &c. James 5. 12. So that no man can doubt of common swearing being a plain violation of the Law of Christ. And 'tis such a one as is manifestly wilful. Every man can easily forbear it he please to speak irreverently of his Earthly Prince, and sure he may as easily forbear to treat with the like bold irreverence the sacred Name of the Sovereign Majesty of Heaven.

Nor is *rash Cursing* less evidently forbidden, Thus we are charg'd by the Ap. Paul, *Bless and Curse not*. Rom. 12. 14. And sure if we were allow'd to curse any, it shou'd be those that are our unreasonable and malicious *Enemies*. But we must be so far from wishing Evil to them that on the contrary we are enjoyn'd, *To love our Enemies, to bless them that curse us, to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them that despitefully use and persecute us*. Matth. 5. 44. And accordingly the Ap. James mentions *Cursing* as one great instance and proof of the *Tongue's being an unruly evil, full of deadly poison*. Jam. 3. 8, 9. And 'tis so heinous an Evil in the *Psalmist's* Judgment, that he gives this as the genuine character of a Wicked Person, *That his mouth is full of cursing*. Ps. 10. 7. And no wonder when this *Sin* is so opposite to that *Love* of our Neighbour which is the sum of all the Duties of the second Table. And for that sin of a man's *cursing himself*, 'tis evidently included and imply'd in the foremention'd prohibitions. And if it be not so expressly mention'd, 'tis only because 'tis too unnatural a Crime to need any explicit condemnation. And indeed it argues a monstrous degeneracy of human Nature that any man shou'd be found guilty of it.

Those then must needs be inexcusable who profess their veneration for the authority of our blessed Saviour, and yet allow themselves in the perverse violation of Precepts so plain, so just, and so easie to be observ'd. Sure such persons shou'd be sensible of the notorious inconsistency of their common practice with the sincerity of their profession. To be a *Christian*, and yet a common *Murderer, Adulterer, Whoremonger, Thief, Drunkard, &c.* look at first view very incompatible: And sure it is as hard to reconcile a Man's being

a Christian with his being a common Swearer or Curser. So that if Men will not renounce these Vices, they wou'd in some respects do more right to Christ and his Holy Religion by openly renouncing his Name, and casting off that honourable Livery of his, which they only disgrace and stain by wearing of it.

Secondly, I wou'd farther argue against these Vices from the *intrinsic evil and pernicious tendency of 'em.*

I begin with *Common-swearing*, and I here chiefly intend that Swearing wherein the Name of God is more expressly us'd and which is therefore especially call'd Profane Swearing, and of the malignant nature and tendency of this Sin, I shall only among many others mention the following instances.

1. I have already suggested, *That common-swearing does in the very nature of it, debase a solemn act of Religious Worship by prostituting it to a common and mean use.*

'Tis only some momentous occasion and urgent necessity can warrant such solemn Appeals to God, and they shou'd be made with all appearance of profound Awe and Reverence. So that this act of Divine Worship is profan'd and expos'd to contempt, when us'd in a rash or trifling manner, without any subserviency to such a valuable end. But

2. *Common swearing argues a want of due Reverence towards God in the mind of the speaker, and tends to abate it in the mind of the Hearers.*

For it cannot be easily conceiv'd that that Man's Soul is habituated to awful apprehensions of so great and terrible a Majesty, who can ordinarily allow himself to trifle with his fearful and reverend Name, and dare presume upon every trivial occasion to make rash Appeals to his all seeing Eye, and to his avenging Justice. For sure none that has a real and profound veneration for so adorable a Being, wou'd ever make this use of his Name without holy trembling and dread, and without great deliberation both concerning the Truth of what he speaks, and the just Occasion of interposing him as the Witness of it. What then can we conclude concerning such as dare upon every slight occasion make a common By word of his dreadful Name, such as never scruple to call the sovereign Judge of the

whole Earth to attest and avouch their ordinary Talk, and stand *Guarantee* for the truth of all their trifling Assertions, but that there is no fear of him before their *Eyes*, no sense of his unconceivable greatness and glory upon their *Hearts*? How despicable is that Sovereign Majesty in thy esteem, when thou dar'st with so high a presumption abuse those sacred Titles of his to rant and bluster with, that shoud not be mention'd without profound humility and dread? Is this such an *Hallowing his Glorious Name* as he requires and thou pretendest so often to pray for, to treat it with less respect than thou woud'st the name of thy Prince or thy Father, nay to defile it by making it serve so vile an end as the venting thy unruly Passion, whenever it prompts thee to rage & storm against thy fellow-Creatures? Can those be thought to stand in awe of that blessed and only Potentate, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who are not afraid to bandy about his adorable Name, as if that were intended to be the common scorn and sport of a lewd and irreligious age?

And as this argues such Irreverence towards God in the Swearer, so it tends to corrupt the minds of those that hear him. For they are thereby (so far as the Swearers Example can influence and infect e'm) tempted to the same slight apprehensions of that glorious Majesty, and contempt of his Omniscience and Justice, that the Swearer evidences by his bold and profane abuse of his holy Name. So that 'tis no thanks to the common Swearer that those he converses with retain any awe of God upon their minds, when they hear him daily treating him with so open disrespect and insolent irreverence.

3. *Common swearing tends to lessen Men's Reverence of an Oath to self, and consequently to prepare e'm for the horrid guilt of Perjury or False-swearing.*

'Tis the character of a good Man, That *He fears an Oath, Eccles.* 9. 2. and therefore as he will not needlessly swear at all, so when he must do it, he has the strictest regard possible to the truth of what he affirms, or sincerity of what he promises under such an awful Bond. But now 'tis evident that common Swearers are seldom or never very critical in examining the Truth of those ordinary

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Assertions, which they rashly interpose the Name of God to warrant and confirm. It cannot reasonably be thought they should be so very cautious in all they speak at random, and especially under the transport of passion, when of all times they are prone to *swear the fastest*. So that if once a Man come so far by the habitual practice of this Sin, as to make no Conscience of using Oaths to attest all that he utters in the heat of Discourse, (when he has neither leisure nor sufficient sedateness of mind to enquire warily into the truth of what he saith), He gives us just ground to conclude that he makes little matter of an *Oath*, since he does upon so small an occasion run the hazard of *forswearing himself*. And if a man can so easily forswear himself in *Passion*, what security have we, that he will not do it in *cool Blood*, when he is under a strong *Temptation*, and hopes his Perjury may pass undiscover'd? For what should in this case restrain him from it? If it be the Natural Reverence of an Oath, and dread of the Justice of God as concern'd to avenge all Perjury, sure if these principles were prevalent & strong in him, they would restrain him from all rash Swearing. For he cannot reasonably pretend to *fear an Oath* that ordinarily *Swears at random*; Nor can he pretend to be much aw'd with the apprehensions of God's *avenging Justice* that so frequently makes such *hasty inconsiderate Appeals* to it. It may be fear'd that he that scruples not the lesser guilt may venture on the greater, since those principles are evidently weaken'd in him that should preserve him from it. And doubtless, 'Tis very much owing to this Vice of *Common Swearing*, that *Perjury* it self has so greatly abounded among us. A crime that at once tends utterly to destroy all *Reverence of God* and *Faith among men*. So that if we would not have this Wickedness (which is both the highest *scandal* to *Religion* and the most pernicious *Bane* to *civil Societys*) to grow upon us, That *Common Swearing* must be restrain'd, which has so evident a tendency to prepare men for it, by turning *Solemn Oaths* into *customary Forms of speaking*.

For the Sin of profane Cursing the malignant Nature and tendency of it will sufficiently appear in these two Instances

1. *Tis a Sin that implys a high degree of Uncharitableness towards men.*

For if *Cursers* really mean as they speak, (and what opinion must we entertain of their truth and honesty if they do not ?) They imprecate the greatest mischiefs imaginable to their fellow creatures, as commonly no less then that the *Devil may take them* or *God may damn them*. Now if they are in earnest, what can we take them for but *Incarnate Devils* that so passionately desire the eternal ruin and misery of others? For if *Devils* could speak with human voice, what language could we expect from those envious Spirits more suitable to the poisonous malignity of their nature then this? And what injury are any of our fellow creatures capable of doing to us, that can any way justify the barbarous cruelty of such direful Imprecations? Would we indeed have all that cross our humour or Interest, or offer us the least Indignity and affront, doom'd for it, to remediless Flames and to the vengeance of Eternal Fire? This were not only to give way to the worst passion of human nature *Revenge*, but to carry it beyond all bounds, as if no less then the irreparable misery of an Immortal Soul could compensate every petty injury we receive. But if *Cursers* pretend, that they do not mean so ill as they speak, and that their real wishes are not so unmerciful as their verbal ones, why then shou'd they affect to talk so like *embodied Fiends*? Why shou'd they suffer their Tongues to be thus *set on fire of Hell*? Why shou'd they thus habituate them to the proper *dialect* of the Infernal Regions?

And if it be so uncharitable a thing to *curse* others, what stupid barbarity is it for a Man to *curse* and *damn* himself. This is such an instance of wickedness as we can scarce think of without astonishment, so that were Men supposed serious in such Imprecations, we must conclude that they are passionately desirous of their own endless destruction, and impatient for the execution of it. So that did we not see the contrary, we shou'd be strongly tempted to think such persons to be under the power of *distraction* and *frenzy*. But alas we find by the use of their Reason in other matters, 'tis only a *voluntary Frenzy*, a *Madness* that their athe-

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iffical Temper and their outrageous Passions are the only causes of.

2. *Profane Cursing expresses a very insolent contempt of the great God.*

I know indeed many use such *Curses* against others as words of course to express their passion by. And therefore wou'd be ready to think we wrong e'm if we shou'd suppose their inward intentions as uncharitable as their expressions. And perhaps it may be reasonably thought that few of those have arriv'd to such a height of diabolical malice who yet too commonly use this hellish language. But what apology then can such persons make for their bold abuse of the vindictive justice of God, when by their Curses they make such rash and senseless addresses to it to execute the dictates of their unruly passion & rage? As if the *Vengeance* of the universal Sovereign and Judge of the whole Earth were to be at our beck to accomplish every wicked Imprecation that our Anger or Malice prompts us to utter! Can we imagin the Hearts of those to be possess'd with any deep veneration for that great and terrible Majesty, who can find nothing else to trifle with or vent their hasty passion by, but his tremendous vindictive Righteousness and his final sentence of eternal Damnation? For sure if we either consider'd or believ'd what these things mean, we shou'd not dare to play with those edged Tools, nor with that Fool (mention'd Prov. 26. 18.) cast forth Firebrands, Arrows, and Death, and then pretend we are but in sport or in passion. This is plainly to affront that very Attribute of God which above all others claims our profoundest dread, and shou'd rather strike us with Terror and Trembling.

And for the sin of Men's *cursing themselves*, it argues an almost incredible contempt of the Divine Vengeance. So that were not our Ears often grated with this language, it cou'd scarce be thought that any cou'd arrive to such a pitch of desperate and daring Impiety. For these Curses are such a bold and open defiance of the glorious Majesty of Heaven, as we may well question whether Devils themselves are guilty of. For they are said to believe and tremble. Jam. 2. 19. They are represented as beseeching our Saviour that he wou'd not torment e'm before the time. Matth. 8. v. 29. Luk. 8. v. 28.

Whereas the more insolent and fearless sinners of our Age, do with an unheard of impudence challenge the Justice of God as if it were too slow in it's execution, and call for their own damnation as if it were too long a coming. What tho they pretend they do not wish it in good earnest? Shou'd they give a righteous God so great provocation to take them at their word, and fulfil their bold Imprecation? Can they find nothing to trifle with and abuse but his tremendous Vengeance, Nothing to sport with but Hell and Damnation? Shou'd not such guilty Creatures rather tremble at the thoughts of the living God, and dread to fall into his avenging hands? Shou'd such dry stubble thus provoke or play with the Consuming Fire? *Hebr. 12. ult.* Is he the everlasting King and Judge, at whose Wrath the Earth trembles, and the Nations are not able to abide his Indignation, and shall every despicable Criminal and Malefactor with a desperate madness thus dare his Almighty Power, and challenge his Vindictive Arm, thus stretch out his hand against God, and strengthen himself against the Almighty, thus run upon him, even upon his Neck and upon the thick bosses of his Buckler? (To use the Elegant Expressions of *Eliphaz, Job. 15. 25. 26.*) How monstrous and amazing Impiety and folly is this? But

Thirdly I proceed to argue against these Vices from the awful Threats of God denounc't against them.

And as both these Sins (if we will allow the third Precept of the Decalogue that latitude and extent that our Saviour's Exposition gives it) are a Taking Gods holy Name in vain, i. e. a very presumptuous irreverent abuse of it, so there is a very terrible Threatning annext against the Breachers of it, *The Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes his Name in vain, Exod. 20. 7. i. e.* He will vindicate the glory of his sacred Name by severely punishing those that treat it with such profane Indignity and contempt. And agreeably hereto the *Ap. James*, enforces this Caution not to swear at all, with this Argument, *Least you fall into condemnation. James, 5. v. 12.* (For so most cōpys read it, tho if we shou'd read it (as some do) *as James, 5. v. 12.* *Least you fall into hypocrisy.* It will confirm the Argument against Common Swearing from it's tendency to involve men in the guilt of *Perjury*). Thus to have
our

our Mouths full of *Curſing and Bitterneſs*, is one of thoſe ſins that render men *abominable to the Vengeance of God*. *Rom. 3. 14.* compar'd with verſ. 19. 20. And our Saviour plainly intimates to us, That except in this point of *ſwearing* our *Righteouſneſs* exceed that of the *Scribes and Pharifees* (tho' they allow'd only common ſwearing by *Creatures*) we cannot enter into the *Kingdom of God*. *Matth. 5. 20.* And as theſe general Threatnings give all common Swearers and Curſers ſo juſt reaſon to fear the ſame eternal *Vengeance and Wrath* that's now reveal'd from *Heaven* againſt all *ungodlineſs of Men*, (and conſequently againſt theſe palpable inſtances of it). *Rom. 1. 18.* So other paſſages of Scripture plainly imply theſe Sins to be among the number of thoſe *crying provocations*, that uſually draw down *temporal Judgment*, and even *publick* ones where they generally abound and reign uncontroll'd. Thus *Hof. 4. 2. 3.* In the Catalogue of thoſe *Vices* for which the *Land* is ſaid to *mourn* (i. e. thro' the diſmal Calamities they entail upon it) *Swearing* leads the van, and is follow'd by *Lying, Killing, Theft, and Adultery* (Crimes of the firſt magnitude.) To the ſame purpoſe we read, *Jer. 23. 10.* Be cauſe of *Swearing* (or as your Margin reads it, *Curſing*) the *Land mourns*. Thus the *ſying Roll* of the Prophet *Zachary* full of *Curſes* is level'd againſt the *Swearer* in general, as well as the *False Swearer*, bringing with it a fatal *conſumption* on his very *House and Family*; as if a *Righteous God* was reſolv'd to *raſe their Name out of this Earth* that ſo *pollute and diſhonour his*. *Zeck. 5. 2, 3, 4, 5.*

I come now in the

Fourth and laſt place, to argue againſt theſe Sins from the *weakneſs and folly of thoſe pretences* that are alledg'd to *excuse and exonerate 'em*.

It has been often and juſtly objected againſt *profane ſwearing*. That no Man has any ſhew of temptation to it. In other Crimes the Devil propoſes ſome ſpecious Bait, ſome *ſenſual Pleaſure* or *worldly advantage*. And tho' this will no way juſtify our known violation of any *Laws of God*, who propoſes Arguments to countervail theſe of infinitely higher moment, yet a Man's being drawn to ſin chiefly by ſuch allurements, ſeems at leaſt to argue, that he



chooses the sin principally for the *gain* and the *pleasure's sake*. That he is not acted by meer contempt of the authority of God; and would not have transgress'd his Commands, if they had not interfer'd with his secular profit, or sensual delight. But tho' this be in it self a very sorry pretence, and a small extenuation of a man's guilt, yet even this is more then the *common swearer* can say for himself. He cannot pretend that he *pleases his Senses or Appetites* by thus wounding his *Conscience*. His numerous Oaths increase no other *Treasures* but those of *Divine Wrath*. No passion of human Nature seems gratify'd by this sin, unless it be a wretched *malignity* and *despight* against the blessed God himself. So that the *common swearer* of all men seems to serve the Devil for *worth* and to be wicked for meer *wickedness's sake*.

And what is so justly said of *profane swearing* may be in a great measure apply'd to *curfing* too. For men cannot pretend to gratify any other passion by it but that of *Revenge*; and they are so far from attaining this end, that their *Curses* usually return on their own *Heads*; and like a *recoyling Gun* only wound and mischieve those that let it off.

But since these *Vices* are practis'd by many that pretend to *wisdom* and *sense*, we shou'd perhaps affront their judgment, if we shou'd suppose they had nothing to say for themselves. And therefore it will be here requisite to take notice of such *Reasons* or *Excuses* as they usually offer. And

First some alledg, That they rarely Swear or Curse but when they are in passion, and in that case they find it hard to forbear, and hope their passion will at least very much excuse their fault.

To shew the vanity of this pretence, I shall only suggest the following particulars.

1. Such anger it self, if it exceed the bounds prescrib'd by the Law of God, is very sinful; and much more when it transports a Man to such instances of profaneness and impiety as these. If he that calls a Man Fool in passion be in danger of Hell-fire, *Matth. 5. 22.* what is he that furiously damns him to the Pain of Hell it self. So that passion is no better excuse for swearing and cursing then 'tis for the Murders which so many commit in the heat of blood. As nothing will sa-

tisfy

istly such *Murderers* upon every slight injury but the blood of him that has done it, so nothing will satisfy the *Curser* but his *Damnation*.

2. Whatever temptation injuries may give us in our passion to curse those that do e'm, they cannot be pretended as any temptation to profane swearing.

Suppose that thy fellow creature has offer'd thee never so great an affront which thy passion prompts thee to revenge, is that any tolerable plea why thou should'st execute that revenge upon thy *Maker*? Is it he that has done thee harm? Is it against him thou art incens'd? Or hast thou no better way to retaliate the wrongs of thy *Enemy*, then by doing a far greater injury to the author of thy Being and the great *Benefactor* of thy Life? Are their provocations any ground for thy tearing and defiling his sacred Name, by whose power thou art every moment preserv'd, and on whose daily care and innumerable benefits, thy life it self and the continued comfort thereof depends? How senselessly dost thou pursue thy *Revenge*, when to vent thy indignation against him that has done thee some (perhaps *inconsiderable*) evil, thou flyest in the face of thy *best Friend*, and offerest the vilest indignity to him that has done thee the greatest good? This sure is such an instance of stupid folly and madness as can hardly be parallel'd.

3. No Provocation can justify our Cursing those that offer it.

For all *Curses* are but the gratification of that private *Revenge* which the divine Law has strictly forbidden. And indeed a Propensity thereto is one of the most noted Lineaments of the *Devil's Image* upon us, and most opposite to that Goodness which is the brightest part of the amiable Image of *God*. 'Tis the character of his children, *To love their Enemies, To bless those that curse them, and to pray for those that despitefully use and persecute them*. Whereas to wish Evil to others as well as to do it to them, are passions that are only kindled from the fire of *Hell*. And how unreasonable are the *Wishes* themselves considering the smallness of the occasion? Another has given thee ill words, or done thee some petty injury, or perhaps only cross'd thy unreasonable humour, and for this, thou desirest he may fall under the direful Curse of *God*, and

be damn'd to endless misery. Is there any thing but monstrous uncharitableness and devilish spite in such witness? Or if thou pretendest that thou dost not really desire it, but only speakest such words to express thy deep resentment of the Injury receiv'd, hast thou no other way to make thy fellow creature sensible of the wrong he has done, but such rash addresses to the terrible vengeance of God? Canst thou find nothing for thy passion to abuse but his tremendous Judgments? Will no Language serve thee to vent thy displeasure in, but such as is fitter for an Incarnate Fiend than a professed Christian? Nay since thy rash Curses can do no harm to those they are darted against, but do truly arm the vengeance of God against thy self, whilst thou really hazard thy own Damnation merely for the satisfaction of thy Revenge in vainly wishing their's? And for men's Cursing themselves 'tis a yet more amazing height of Folly, because others have done us a small wrong to wish our own eternal ruine, and give the Justice of God the highest provocation to execute it.

Secondly others pretend, That there's no way so proper for 'em to keep their Inferiors in awe, as by such language as this. That a sawcy Servant, or bold Clown can no way be so easily humbled and frightened into his duty as by a volley of Oaths and Curses, and will scarce think a Man in good earnest offended with him unless he swear and damn.

To this pretence I shall only say these two things.

1. *This is no more then a bare pretence.* There are thousands in the World that know well enough how to keep their Inferiors in due awe and subjection without any such unhallowed arts of Government. And those that will not be frightened with the grave threats and frowns of such as have a just right to chastize their Insolence, will as stiffly stand the shock of an empty peal of Oaths and Curses. Whereas if they find that a Superior punctually makes his threats good, they'l as readily believe 'em for the future as if he swore to 'em.

2. *As this is but a meer pretence, so 'tis a very unreasonable and senseless one.*

Is it a matter of such concern to keep thy Inferiors in awe, that thou shouldst scruple no means that tend to it? To treat them with extravagant passion or barbarous severity would as effectually do it. But would the attaining of that end excuse the use of such inhuman means? How much less then will it excuse thy blasphemous Insolence against God? Hast thou no other way to make others stand in fear of thee, then by assuming the character of the unjust Judge, who *neither feared God nor regarded Man*? Luke, 18, 2. Canst thou find no better expedient to prevent the affronts of others, then by offering thy self the most daring Indignity unto the Majesty of Heaven? Must nothing but his adorable name serve thee to hector and rant with? Is there no way of persuading others that thou art angry with them but by calling on him to *damn them*, as if his impartial Justice were at the call and command of every such wild Fury as thy self?

Thirdly others pretend, *That they have no other end in Swearing and Cursing but to persuade others of the truth of what they say.*

Answer 1. *This can justify no Oaths but what we use on solemn Occasions, where some important but doubted truth needs to be confirm'd by human Testimony.* And in such Cases solemn appeals to God by Oaths are allowable.

2. *Oaths ordinarily us'd in common Conversation are no proper means to attain any such end as the giving credit to our Assertions.* If thou art a Man of known Veracity and Truth such Oaths are in ordinary Converse altogether needless, and thy bare affirmation will be sufficient without them. Why then should'st thou call thy own honesty into question, by acting as if thou supposed'st that no man will believe thy bare Word without thy Oath to confirm it? But if thy Veracity be really doubted by those thou conversest with, thy rash multiply'd Oaths will signify little to remove their suspicion. For those with whom Swearing is a customary thing, and Oaths but words of course, no wise man will ever lay a greater stress upon them then upon their naked affirmations. For he that scarce speaks without an Oath, if he be given to Lying, is as prone to swear when he speaks false as when he speaks true, and

indeed ordinarily scarce observes or considers when he swears and when he *does not*. Nay,

3. Customary Swearing rather *deserves* and *crosses* this very end that is pretended to *Excuse* it.

For Swearing and Lying are so neerly ally'd, and so seldom separated, that he that will do the *one*, it may be strongly presum'd he will not much scruple the *other*. What can give us a probable ground to conclude a mans Veracity but this, *That he seems to have the fear of God before his Eyes*. So that if a Man appear devoy'd of that, we have little security of the truth of what he says. And what can give us a juster suspicion of that, then that he has no *fear of an Oath*, and no *reverence* for the sacred Name of God? And mankind have generally so true a sence of this, that with all but a few weak and silly people, The *more* a man Swears the *less* he is believ'd, and his very multiply'd rash Oaths raise a suspicion of the truth of what he speaks when there is scarce any other ground for it.

Fourthly others pretend, *that they have got such a Custom of Swearing that they cannot leave it*.

To this Plea I shall only give this brief Reply.

1. If men shou'd alledg the same pretence for other Sins they wou'd easily see the *folly* of it.

So has many a Drunkard an untoward inveterate Custom of making a Beast of himself. Many a Thief can hardly forbear pilfering when he has a tempting opportunity. Many are so habituated to Lying that they can scarce tell when they do it. And some mens brutish Lusts seem to hurry them with an uncontroll'd violence. But sure this is thought in all other Cases a horrible aggravation of men's Sins, because it shews that they have by long practice so stupify'd their Consciences that they make little or no resistance against Temptations, being now become scared and past feeling. And shall that then be thought to Excuse the guilt of Swearers that heightens the guilt of all other Sinners? How comes this Dialect of Hell to be so familiar to thee, but by the frequent indulged use of it? And does that abate the Crime and render it less hainous and detestable?

2. Men

2. *Men are under no greater inability to leave this sin than others.*

'Tis a plain evidence, That mens pretences that they cannot forbear are but unreasonable, when the most desperate Swearer can refrain in company that he stands in any awe of. The very fear of the *penalty* has already laid a considerable restraint on this Vice. And if men wou'd once use their considering powers, shou'd not the *fear of God* do as much to curb e'm as the *fear of Men*? Besides the grace of God is not wanting to sincere endeavours. He that calls us to Repentance for this and all other sins, can upon our humble application to him, give us strength to perform our serious purposes of it.

3. *If thou canst not leave this wretched habit of Swearing and Cursing, there's no remedy but to suffer the Vengeance denounc'd against such sins.*

Is it *customary to thee to swear and damn*, so is it *customary with a righteous God to avenge* such abuse of his holy Name and contempt of his Terrible Justice. If thou canst not *reform* thy practice so neither can he *repent* of his dreadful Threatnings. If thy inveterate wickedness lay thee under such a *necessity* of going on to sin, so will his inflexible Justice lay him under a *necessity* of punishing such incorrigible sinners. But sure 'tis far easier for *thee* to *change thy temper and practice* then for a just God to *change his own nature*, or to falsify the truth of his word.

Fifthly, some pretend, *That swearing is so much in fashion that they shou'd be ridicul'd as precise and singular if they scrupled it.*

To this I wou'd only reply.

1. *If Swearing be in fashion, 'tis so far from being a Mode peculiar to Persons of Quality and Birth; that 'tis rather most us'd by the very scum of mankind.*

In this point of *breeding*, a Porter or Coachman can vye with a Gentleman or Lord, and the meanest Centinel or Tarpaulin equal the most *buffing Officer*. And indeed 'tis so far from adding any real *grace or decency* to men's language, that nothing usually renders men's discourses more sottish and senseless, more rude and ill-manner'd

ner'd then the *Oaths* and *Curses* wherewith they *lard* it. So that were it not for grating upon the Ears of devout people, nothing cou'd do more to put men out of countenance with their hellish Language then to repeat it to them. The Reader may see an Instance hereof in the late ingenious *Author of the Essays upon Projects*. For I am loth to *defile* this paper with so *abominable stuff*.

2. *If it be in fashion to Swear and Curse, it must needs be accounted a very odious one to all that have not quite ras't all sence of piety out of their minds.*

For nothing can ever make *Swearing* and *Damning* pass justly for a piece of *good breeding* till we can perswade the World, 'tis a piece of commendable Gallantry to despise and defy the Deity, and that to be a *Rebel* against the Laws of Heaven is the truest *badg* of honour upon Earth. So that till *professed Atheism* come in vogue, and *Vice* be capable of *ennobling* a man's blood, these Instances of *profaness* will never pass for marks of *Gentility*, and to be a *Swearer* and *Curser* will never be reckon'd among men's *Titles of Honour*.

3. *Let these Vices be never so common, No man shou'd Swear and Curse for company that is not content to be damned for company too.*

If men must needs go with a multitude to do Evil, they know whither the broad way will lead e'm. But sure 'tis much better to hazard the reproach of being *singular* and *precise* then out of compliance with so detestable a fashion to venture upon *perishing for ever*. 'Tis too great a *complaisance* to a lewd age to go to Hell with e'm, and that for nothing.

Lastly, some may possibly pretend, *That they at least may be allow'd to Swear and Curse, because they believe neither God nor Devil, neither Heaven nor Hell.*

I must confess this is the most specious Plea that can be alledg'd for such practices. For he that believes *no God* has some pretence to make bold with what he takes to be an *empty name*. He has no fear of divine Justice to restrain him from an insolent defiance of it. His Actions and his Principles are both of a piece. And yet even to such I wou'd suggest what is sufficient to dissuade e'm from *Swearing and Cursing*. For

I. *This*

1. *This pretence cannot excuse these Vices from rudeness and ill manners.*

There is no Man that pretends to the Education of a Gentleman, but will think it highly uncivil without the least provocation, to abuse any the Company has a great respect for. Sure then that good breeding itself which Atheistical persons sometimes boast of, shou'd restrain them from *wounding* the Ears of those that believe and reverence a Deity, with such profane abuse of his adored Name. Especially when thereby they violate the publick Laws and affront the authority of the Nation. 'Tis a great indecency to treat with *contempt* what the generality of mankind pay the highest *Veneration* to. And if every Loyal Subject resent it as a great provocation to hear his Prince abus'd and vilify'd, they cannot imagine it a less offence to every good Man, to hear that Blessed Being treated with such open Indignity to whom he bears the highest reverence and affection. And indeed in what pious Soul wou'd it not raise just horror and Indignation to hear that Eternal Majesty, whom Angels adore and before whom Devils tremble, made the May-game and scorn of every irreligious and leud Buffoon?

2. *Even Interest it self shou'd restrain Atheistical Persons from these Vices.*

For 'tis certain they get nothing by them. The Age is not yet so degenerate that *meer Damning* will qualify a man for *preferment*. And the most brutish *Epicure* might enjoy all his beloved *pleasures* and never miss that of *Swearing*. Now if there be no advantage to be had by these sins, 'tis much safer to let them alone. For after all the confidence of Atheists, 'tis possible there may be a God and a Life to come. So that if their great confidence shou'd in this point deceive them, (as most certainly it will) they'l find that their Oaths and Curses will but encrease the score of their Guilt, and render the sight of their incens'd Judg more unsupportable to them. For among all their other sins (as I have already suggested) they'l find no shadow of Excuse for these. And indeed no man shou'd commit them but he who is willing to run the hazard of Damnation for the meer pleasure of being wicked.

I shall only, to these Arguments which are more directly suited to professed Christians, subjoyn the Judgment of the more sober Heathens in reference to the sin of *Swearing*, if possible to shame e'm out of it. *Plato* in his Book *de Legibus* mentions it as a commendable Institution, *That none should pollute the Names of the Gods by a slight customary mention of e'm.* *Hierocles* recommends *Swearing* rarely as necessary to preserve the due reverence of an Oath, and speaks of common *Swearing* as the high Road to *Perjury*. *Quintilian* tells us, *a grave Man should not Swear except in cases of necessity.* And *Epictetus* advises, *it possible to avoid it.* *Isocrates* allows Oaths only in two cases, either to vindicate one's Innocence, or to save one's Self or Friends from unjust Punishment. And sure such strict Maxims deliver'd by Pagan Moralists shou'd make the very blood rise in the face of those pretended *Ch.istians*, who fall so far short of their excellent Rules, and much more of those of our Blessed Saviour. For if we that enjoy the light of so glorious and clear a Revelation, do not practise what the very Light of Nature dictates, even Pagans will rise up in Judgment against us to reproach and condemn us.

And now I wou'd entreat the Swearers and Cursers of the Age (if they have not quite extinguish'd their power of thinking) seriously to consider these plain Arguments, in which they'l find no rhetorical aggravations, but a naked representation of these Vices in their native but ugly hue. Which if they wou'd impartially do, one wou'd hope, unless they have quite abandon'd their Reason, they cannot withstand the evidence of Truth in e'm, nor go on in these wretched practices without offering as ungrateful violence to their own Consciences, as their profane language has long done to the Ears of all good Men.

Having dispatcht this first Head, I come

II. To offer something for exciting both Magistrates and Private Persons to their duty in order to the suppressing these Vices by the effectual execution of the Law lately made against e'm.

I begin with Magistrates. I know indeed the Penalty which the Act itself lays on the Justices of Peace in case they fail of their du-

ry in executing it, may seem to make it needless to urge e'm to it. Yet since all Magistrates may do much to promote the design of this *Act*, by *encouraging Informations*, by *concealing the Name of the Informer* (where the discovery of it is no way necessary, nor can be legally demanded); and by *severely punishing any Revenge that Convicted Persons may execute on others for informing against e'm*, I shall only briefly suggest a few considerations to e'm.

1. *Your zeal for the honour of Almighty God should prompt you to do your utmost for the suppression of these Vices.*

You all pretend to make this one design of your publick Administrations. The great God puts an eminent opportunity into your hands to manifest the sincerity of your pretensions. If then you have any devout and affectionate Veneration for that Blessed and only Potentate, any real concern for his honour and for the uncontested interest of Religion, you have now a *fair occasion* to shew it. And if you improve it not, God and all good Men will join in condemning your inexcusable *lukewarmness* in so just and glorious a Cause.

2. *Your regard to the publick safety should also engage you to it.*

You oft pretend a mighty zeal for the *Publick Good*. Now what can you do more likely to subserve that truly valuable end, then by stopping that torrent of Impiety and Profaneness that is otherwise like to overflow us again with new and heavier Calamities?

I doubt not but all good men are fully persuaded, That our relapsing into these and other Vices has had a great influence on the prolonging the successes and triumphs of our Enemies, and the retarding our happy settlement. So that our hopes of a more favourable providence to make a happy change in the scene of our publick Affairs chiefly depend on the success of these attempts of a necessary and general Reformation. And those will do the truest service to their Country that are most instrumental and active in promoting it.

3. *Your concern for your own final account should effectually excite you to it.*

As you profess ultimately to derive your Authority from God the Universal Sovereign, and Fountain of all civil power, so you own your selves accountable to him. Shou'd you not then seriously think how the great Judge of the Earth will resent it, if you trifle with so great an advantage for vindicating and repairing his injured honour, and for restoring the Veneration due to his sacred Name? And on the contrary. How highly he will approve of your fidelity, if you now answer your character by being a *Terror to Evil-doers*, If by the awe of your just authority, you force insolent profaneness and iniquity to *stop it's mouth*, and cast as open contempt on these detestable *Vices*, as they have done upon the glory of God. Let not the guilt of these publick Crimes lye any longer at your door, by your connivance at them or the slackness of your Endeavours to restrain them.

But I wou'd chiefly address my self to *private Persons*. For since you are so much *concern'd* and are so *necessary Instruments* in the Execution of this Law, it will be needful to excite you to your duty. And the rather because whereas the Law it self obliges the *Magistrate* to do his part, 'Tis only *Conscience* and a *sincere regard to the glory of God* that can excite you to do yours. And to engage you to it, I shall briefly suggest to you the following particulars.

1. *'Tis your undoubted duty to contribute your Endeavours towards the suppression of these detestable Vices.*

You can no more question this, then you can your Obligations to advance the glory of God and promote a publick Reformation, so far as your private sphere gives you fit opportunities for it. Those did but perform their necessary duty that declar'd to *Moses* the Blasphemy of the *Son of Shelimith*, *Levit. 24. 11.* Nor those that found out and convicted *Idolaters*, *Deut. 17. 4, 5.*— And there are multitudes of private persons that can never expect a more eminent advantage of publick usefulness to be put into their hands. So that their sloth will be inexcusable if they make no improvement of so valuable a Talent. And sure in the present contest between the *Kingdom of God* and that of *Satan*, between the interest of *Piety* and *Vertue* and that of *Profaneness* and *Vice*, no
good

good man ought to stand *Neater*, and think himself unconcern'd which prevails. Such a clear Cause requires and will justify our *forward Zeal*, and here *lukewarmness* and *indifferency* are truly detestable.

2. *Without your Endeavours the design of this Law (viz the suppressing these Vices) is like to be frustrated, and the guilt thereof will in this case lye much upon your selves.* For without *Informations* there can be no *Convictions* and *Forfeitures*, and consequently Offenders will go on in *bold defiance* both to the *Laws of God and Man*. So that if you shrink and give back, If you desist from your Endeavours, from the consideration of the small trouble and hazard of them, the *declining Cause of Profaneness* will again *bear up its head*, and endanger the overflowing the Land with a more irresistible violence then it did before. You have now the *fairest opportunity* put into your hands of promoting a publick Reformation, so that if you emprove it not, the guilt of other men's sin will be in a great measure charg'd upon you. And will you that have so often seem'd to *pray* so earnestly for the suppression of these Vices decline so necessary endeavours to *farther* it? Shall so glorious and so blessed a work sink thro your *lukewarmness* and *indifferency* in it? Do you pretend to *lament* these abominable crimes, and will you not do what is so evidently in your power towards the *crushing* of them? Shall the leud Swearers of the Age be more *Zealous* to *profane* then you to *keep up the Reverence* of God's Holy Name?

3. *There is a happy prospect of success in your Endeavours.*

For if once *Informations* become *general* by every good man's combining to do his part, Offenders will have no *hope of Impunity*. And Experience dos already sufficiently tell us, that how *fond* soever men are of *Swearing*, yet they are *loth* to *pay* for it; so that we may hope in time they'l rather part with their *Oaths* then with their *Money*. Nay we see that how insolent soever these sinners seem in *outbraving the Justice of God*, yet they are wonderfully *appal'd* and *hang down their heads* when a *Constable* surprizes them with a *Warrant* upon a *second or third Conviction*. And how much soever they were wont to *glory* in this vice, they do not take

it for any great honour to have their *Names* on publick record in the *black Roll*. In this Capital City Oaths are in a great measure silent in the *streets* and seek shelter in the *Taverns* and *Ale-houses*, nor are they altogether safe there. So that if you will but generally concur with unanimous zeal in giving in *Informations*, there is little doubt but the *fear of the penalty* will with the most effect what no other *Arguments* cou'd hitherto do. And I hope your attempts in this *City* will set a *Pattern* that will in a little time influence other parts of the *Kingdom* and make the *Reformation Universal*.

4. *You have no ground to be either ashamed or afraid in so necessary and commendable a service to God and to the Interest of Religion.*

In this *honourable Cause*, that Name of an *Informer* which in most other cases has justly so ill a sound, is far from being any mark of *Reproach*. For *Offenders* themselves, if they wou'd speak impartially, cannot but own your practice to be free from any suspicion of mean and base ends. For what shou'd incite a man without the least prospect of any *advantage* to himself, nay with a certain prospect of some *trouble* and *danger*, to do so *unwelcome* an Office, and so likely to *disoblige* those whom he wou'd reform, but a *sincere Zeal* for the honour of God and for the Observance of his *Laws*? They cannot reasonably suppose you are acted with any other *Spite* and *Malice*, then a very *just* and *laudable* one against *Profaneness* and *Irreligion*. Nay shou'd those you inform against, be so unreasonable as to misinterpret and censure your *Zeal*, sure the *Approbation* of the great God and of all good men, shou'd sufficiently counterballance their groundless *Reproaches* and *Calumny's*. And it will be found in the great day of Trial a greater honour to have been a *faithful Informer* against *Vice*, then a *base Conniver* at it, and a *wretched Betrayer* of the honour of God and Religion.

Nor shou'd you be discourag'd by the hazard you run of exposing your selves to the *malice* or *revenge* of *Offenders*. If *Magistrates* wou'd but as generally encourage *Informations* by refusing to discover the *Informers* name: without just cause (as some few to their great honour have done) this difficulty wou'd be in a great measure

sure remov'd. But however that be, you have the *protection* of the *Laws* as a security against the injuries of any engag'd Offenders, and I doubt not the Government wou'd punish 'em with a just severity. But 'tis a far more considerable encouragement that you may expect the *protection* of the great God whose Cause you herein so signally espouse. And shou'd your Zeal for his honour expose you to any present disadvantage, he can easily make it up in *temporal Blessings*, and will do it abundantly with *eternal Rewards*. And sure we are not the real Disciples of Christ, if every appearance of difficulties can deter us from so evident a duty, if we dare *balk* so signal a piece of service, meerly because we cannot do it without some *self denial* and *bazard*.

And if upon such Considerations you resolve upon the faithful discharge of your Duty, it will be easy to find out the most proper method of doing it. There are many in this City engag'd in that excellent work to whom you may adjoyn your selves. And indeed if every *Parish* had stated and select Consults, they might carry on this great and pious design with greater regularity, order and success by their mutual advice and resolution.

It remains now

III. To enquire into the grounds of those loud Complaints lately made against private Informations.

'Tis evident, That the *Act against Swearing* dos no way require that the Offender shou'd be present, when the *Information* is given against him. Nor dos any *Clause* in it oblige the *Justices of the Peace* to discover the *Informer's Name*, when the Offender dos not dispute the matter of fact. So that there is no pretence of this method (of receiving private Informations upon Oath, and concealing the *Informer's Name* when there's no just cause of declaring it) being any way opposite to the design of this *Act*, and 'tis evident on the contrary that it highly tends to promote the great end of it.

But since there are several *Objections* rais'd against it, I shall briefly consider the most material I have yet met with.

I. Some alledg, That 'tis contrary to natural Justice and Equity, and to the course of the Law in other cases, that a man shou'd be convicted

vided and punisht for a Crime, without having his Accuser brought face to face, at least without so much as knowing who he is.

Ans. This *Objection* could indeed admit of no Reply, if the Accused person, even when he complains of being wrong'd, could no way know, who his Accuser is, and were debarr'd from the priviledg both of *defending* his Innocence and *prosecuting* the Accuser. But I suppose there is no such thing practis'd. For no *Justices of the Peace* deny any person the knowledg of the Informer's Name, if the person accus'd insist upon his Innocence, and engage to prosecute the Informer for Perjury in what he has sworn against him. But if the person accus'd desire to know the Informer's Name upon any other Terms, 'Tis reasonable to suppose that he desires it only to have the opportunity of Executing his private Revenge upon him. At least there is no just Cause to discover the Informer's Name unless the accused person solemnly declare (and if required do it upon Oath) that he knows the Information to be false, and in that case I suppose no *Justice of Peace* will conceal the Informer's Name, nor any *honest* Informer desire it.

Others object, *That this method of private Informations exposes a Man to the malice of any who will but venture to perjure themselves to do him a mischief. And it seems to give Encouragment to such malice, when persons may hope to give in false Informations undiscover'd.*

Ans. 'Tis not reasonable to suppose that any Man will perjure himself in order to the convicting another, when he can thereby do him so very little Injury. And this is the more unlikely ever to happen, when such a false Informer runs so great hazard of being found guilty of perjury and being severely punish't for it. For there is no Man that is conscious of his own Innocence but would prosecute such a perjur'd person to the utmost, and if he engage to do so, he may know his Name.

If it be reply'd, *That if a false Informer positively persist in his Accusation and the person accus'd have no Witness or other Evidence to oppose thereto, he seems left without Remedy.*

To this I need only answer, this *Objection* concerns the *Act* it self, and not this particular manner of executing it. The *Law-makers* for the more effectual suppression of these Vices have
made

made the *Information upon Oath of one witness*, sufficient to convict an *Offender*, because they suppos'd no man wou'd falsly upon Oath accuse another of such a Crime that has no hope to reap any advantage from the Penalty. Especially when a *perjur'd Informer* runs so great hazard of being detected, as will in all probability deter him from this dangerous way of executing so poor a Revenge; since his Perjury can expose the accused person to very small damage in comparison of the Punishment he runs the risk of, if the Accuser shou'd clear his Innocence.

Others object, *That this way of clandestine Informations is very unfair and dishonourable. 'Tis like stabbing a man behind his back. Whereas the Informer shou'd in civility first caution the Offender, and try what a gentle admonition will do, before he use this rougher method of reforming him. At least he shou'd have the courage to avow what he dos, and not do it in so sneaking and clandestine a way.*

Ans. 1. If the *Informer* be well acquainted with the *Offender* it may be very advisable first to try this gentler way of *Admonition* and *Reproof*.

2. But as this *Act* is chiefly design'd for the reclaiming of *Common Swearers*, and 'tis those generally that fall under the Lash of it, so it may be reasonably presum'd, that such are past the hope of being reform'd by meer good Advice, and are sensible of no other Argument but what touches their Interest; And the Law gives e'm sufficient warning of the danger they run in respect of that by these crimes.

3. 'Tis not because *Informers* are asham'd of what they do, that they desire to pass undiscover'd, but because they wou'd obviate several Inconveniences that such discovery of their Names wou'd occasion to the real disadvantage of the *Act* it self, as well as to their own particular prejudice. (Of which I shall have occasion to make some mention in what follows.)

And as I can discern no solid weight in these *Objections* against concealing the *Informers Name*, so on the other hand, 'tis undenyably evident that this method is every way most conducive to attain the design of the *Act* by the entire suppression of these abominable Vices. For

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1. This

...those to give in Information
...sincere Zeal for the honour of Almighty
...Party.

For as such will be very careful to give in none but true Informations, of which the accused persons may easily upon reflexion be conscious to themselves; so they will be under no Temptation to be disheartned from their duty by the fear of Revenge or ill will, when they know that those they accuse cannot learn their Names without obliging themselves to prosecute them for Perjury, which they may well suppose they'l never attempt when incapable of proving it.

2. *The discovery of the Informer's Name will be attended with great Inconveniences to him, to the obstructing the design of the Act, without any real considerable advantage to the Party accused.*

If the Informer's Name be constantly discover'd, he is thereby needlessly expos'd to the Malice and Revenge of the Offender, to whom he intends thereby a real service. So that in all probability he will make the most of those he convicts, his *Enemies*; however he do truly herein act the part of a sincere *Friend* to them. And no doubt the prospect of this will greatly discourage many from doing their duty, and render others too slack and cold in it. And if once Informations be discourag'd, The Terror of the penalty will be over, and the *Act* gradually lose it's force, and these Insolent sinners as daringly outbrave the *Law of Man* as they have hitherto done the *Law of God*. So that we may soon expect that these pernicious vices will like a Torrent, that has broke down a weak Digue, return upon us with a more irresistible violence.

And these Inconveniences to the Informer are attended with no real considerable advantage to the *Accused Party*; unless we take it for an advantage that by discouraging Informations, these Offenders may sin with greater hope of Impunity. (Which is the very mischief which the Act is design'd to obviate). For if the *Information* be true, what is the Offender the better for knowing who gives it? He may thereby indeed understand whom to level his spite against; Or he may know whose company he shou'd shun or

Stand

stand on his guard in ; and so prevent a new Conviction by taking care to swear only in such company where he may do it safely But if the Information be false, the person accused is not deny'd the satisfaction of knowing whom to prosecute as perjur'd for giving it, if he will engage to do it.

I shall only add, that I hope what I have here suggested will not tempt the *Swearers* and *Cursers* of the Age to conclude, that if this method of *private Informations* were lay'd aside, they shou'd go unpunisht. For I doubt not they will find so many inspir'd with Zeal in so just a Cause, as will soon convince them, these Vices shall not escape the penalty of the Law for want of *open Informations*. However some timorous and lukewarm persons may decline their duty, there are others that are more justly afraid of being accessary to their guilt by concealing it and conniving at it.

Upon the whole, If now both *Magistrates* and *private persons* wou'd but heartily join their Endeavours; the latter by faithfully giving, and the former by prudent encouraging and countenancing *Informations*, We may hope to see these crying *Impietys* of the Age effectually suppress'd, that have been so long the scandal and bane of our holy Religion, and the fruitful source of our publick Calamity's. Whereas if *Magistrates* discourage and frown upon *Informers*, and their Zeal decline in giving Evidence against *Offenders*, we may justly fear these hainous *provocations* will revive, and rise to as desperate a height as ever, and in despite of the Law reign as uncontrol'd as before. And what can we reasonably conclude from thence, but that such renewed *profanation* of the holy Name and defiance of the terrible Justice of Almighty God, will draw down heavier Judgments upon us then we have yet felt. For the Justice of God will not always be out dar'd by the Wickedness of Men. But if they are incorrigible in Sinning, he will be inexorable in Punishing. For (to apply to our selves the remarkable words of that pious Reformer *Ezra* 9. 13, 14.) *If after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds and our great trespass (wherein God has yet punish'd us far less then our Iniquitys deserv'd) and after so glo-*

a deliverance as this we shoud again break his commands, ~~we~~
 could we look for but that a righteous God would be angry with us,
 till he have consumed us, so that there shoud be no remnant nor
 escaping. For in this case our publick sins would be attended
 with two of the highest aggravations we can well conceive, an
 Insolent Contempt of God's terrible Judgments, and the vilest
 ingratitude for as remarkable Favours as were ever bestow'd by
 Heaven upon an unworthy People.



FINIS

